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Simone Abram

The emphasis on mobility in the social sciences arose in response to an imbalance: a perceived overemphasis on stasis and an analytical repertoire with more to say about people and things in places rather than in motion. As such, it was a welcome corrective to a potentially ossifying tendency to fix ideas and categories in time and space, one that severely restricted the available approaches to complex and fluid issues including migration, travel and tourism. The notion of mobility, encompassing movement and travel at all scales, brings with it some curious effects, though. While drawing attention to the static approaches in previous analysis, it has a similarly all-encompassing effect, flattening very diverse and sometimes incommensurable forms of motion and movement and integrating them into one conceptual arena. In doing so, it may be subject to the same type of criticism it posed to pre-mobility research – as a blanket approach that prioritises mobility over stasis, rather than vice versa, which is implicit in the tendency to refer to a mobilities ‘paradigm’ or a ‘turn’. One of the challenges of this volume is to pick through the various aspects of mobility research that pose methodological challenges, while retaining awareness of stasis as more than the absence of mobility. In this brief afterword, I reflect on some of the implications, possibilities and limitations of the concept of mobility.

What does mobility do?

What does it mean to say that a ‘mobilities approach’ offers the potential to integrate different kinds of movement into one conceptual arena? On the one hand, using a concept as broad as mobility allows us to step back from judgements and distinctions between different kinds of movement, and suspend our preformed categorisations. In other words, it opens for a non-judgemental approach to human movement that offers an escape route from politically and socially loaded terms such as migration, tourism, commuting, travelling. It also enables us to draw comparisons across both time and space, between species, and between material and immaterial forms. Mobility is a term that has relevance not only for human movement but for the movement of other beings, material and ideas. Nor is mobility scale-specific, and since almost everything in the universe moves at some scale, mobility can be explored at the scale of the atom and that of the universe and more or less everything in between. Yet mobility at the intimate scale is quite different conceptually and materially to mass migration. What value does a concept have that covers everything from walking round a room to intercontinental migration, even as it relativises them (Adey 2006)?

In this volume, the emphasis is on human movement and all the material and immaterial movement that supports moving humans. Packed into the term mobility, however, there are confusions. Several terms tend to co-mingle: movement and mobility interlink with kindred terms such as travel or distance (Cresswell 2006). As the introduction highlights, movement can be purely in the mind and the potential for movement can be as significant as any actual movement, certainly in relation to the perception of human freedom, for example. Motility – the potential to be mobile – is important to all of the people represented in the chapters here, albeit in different ways. Leivestad draws out the significance of the wheels remaining on the caravans and mobile homes of the British residents at Camping Mares. Even though they may be disguised behind panels, their existence is important not only to satisfy the rules of the

campsite, but to emphasise the motility of the inhabitants in a paradoxical state of temporary permanence. British mobile-home dwellers are not participating in the nomadism of non-settled people, but imagine themselves in a permanent state of revolt or resistance to a state, while clinging to the ideology of nationalism; dreaming of being free Englishmen while fleeing the benefits the state wishes to endow, for which it demands the participation of its citizens. Anderson, Vium and Lucht emphasise in different ways how the difference in the travel trajectories between the would-be migrant adventurers, police, border guards and participants in what Anderson calls as the 'illegality industry' lie in their level of potential freedom to travel and the ways in which different kinds of restrictions delineate the limits to their mobility. These cases also highlight the European ambivalence towards nomadism, both a romantic fiction and a feared instability.

The key ambivalence in the volume lies in the methodological responses to the recognition of mobility and motility. The folklore of ethnographic individualism lives on despite its mythical footings, which several contributors allude to, Anderson noting the unfortunate tendency of Anthropology departments to reproduce the single-ethnographer myth through doctoral training and reminding us again that even the great mythologiser Malinowski conducted multi-sited fieldwork. The British and American traditions also pay less attention to the great French ethnologists, such as Georges Henri Rivi re, whose commitment to European ethnography and museology saw multidisciplinary teams of researchers embark on collecting exercises (see Chiva 1985)¹, with its apotheosis in the Aubrac studies in the 1960s (CNRS 1970-1982)² and their subsequent associated migration studies (see Chodkiewicz 2014)³. Comparison between such projects and the preceding folkloric collection practices might be drawn with the Swedish-Finnish nation-building folklorism that  sterlund-P tzsch describes in such wonderful detail. As she points out, the enthusiastic mobility of the young collectors over-emphasised the immobility of the folk visited, reinforcing the notion of a link between land and nation that made a Swedish-speaking nation a political force in Finland on the back of the romantic nature-nationalism that swept across Europe in the latter part of the nineteenth century. It is fascinating to contemplate the variable scales of mobility at play in the enterprise described by  sterlund-P tzsch, as collectors adopted walking-and-talking methods only relatively recently identified as a 'method' per se (e.g. Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Powell and Rishbeth 2012)⁴.

What is newer to ethnographic research, on the other hand, is the potential for digital participant observation, a co-presence that Walton describes as physicality that is mediated through online media, specifically images, so that the co-presence is as much image-to-image as face-to-face, using photoblogging, geolocating and image sharing. Digital ethnography and 'netnography' are now widespread methodological approaches (see Murthy 2008; O'Reilly 2012; Hsu 2013; Postill 2015)⁵ and Walton shows how mobility can be considered within and through digital methods, particularly in the context of difficult to access fields. The digital exhibition she co-curated with her interlocutors is an elegant concept, since visitors can come and go at a digital exhibition

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as they can at a physical gallery, and perhaps the emotional, conceptual, and communicative distance and proximity with the curators is equivalent in virtual terms. The co-curating, on the other hand, is of a different order, requiring intense preparation and negotiation, a co-production for a new ethnography that is public, applied and theoretical (Pink and Abram 2015)⁶. Photography is another methodological theme that emerges in this volume, not least in Vium's discussion of his use of the camera as a tool to generate dialogue as much as to create images. Vium's concern here is with the dialogical relation that the camera facilitates between himself as photographer and the clandestine migrants that he is documenting, but through his photography he is also generating dialogues with viewers of the images, another pertinent methodological direction. Indeed, although much of this volume is taken up with the field-methods of ethnography, we can also turn our attention to the mobile methodology that is the creation of the ethnographic work and its circulation among different audiences and interlocutors. So often these are treated as separate domains, yet the current climate of preoccupation with the 'impact' of research actually reinforces those approaches that see them as contiguous, such as Walton's. In this approach, ethnographic research 'with' (in Ingold's 2008 sense⁷) is interwoven in an ongoing dialogue, the fields of research and dissemination blending into a shared journey. Research projects do have beginnings and ends, proposals, actions and outcomes, but for ethnographers these often blur into longer commitments to people and ideas, and seep into the everyday life of the researcher as well as the researched (see Smart et al. 2014)⁸.

Mobile methods

The implications of mobility for methodology can be summarised under two headings. First, as suggested above, the shift to mobility in the social sciences has been a pendulum swing from roots to routes, from static to mobile social sciences. Österlund-Pötzsch highlights the historical ambivalence intrinsic to this swing by reminding us that mobile methods themselves are not new, but illustrates how the distribution of mobility and stasis between researcher and researched have shifted. Still, either of the two poles – mobility or stasis – can eclipse the other, and the gradual shift of the pendulum should take us forward to a new resting place, where methods acknowledge both the mobile and the immobile. From this new starting point, mobility and immobility need not be set in opposition to one another creating yet another dichotomy to be overcome, but with an awareness of the unequal distribution of mobility and immobility as in the chapters here that focus on migration and the illegality industry. The freedom of Vium and Lucht to travel is also their freedom to leave and to return in contrast to their co-travellers (we hear less about the traffickers in this particular volume). The new methods proposed in this volume recognise that the world is in motion without reifying movement over stasis. The challenge here is to acknowledge mobility without prioritising it, to see im/mobility as complementary, rather than 'shadow' concepts (see Strathern 2011)⁹.

Second, bringing all kinds of movement into the same conceptual terrain under the rubric of 'mobility', while potentially flattening (as I indicated above), also creates

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spaces for rewarding comparative critique. It can reveal the commonalities between movements and separates the movement from the meanings attached. Migration need not be seen as a categorical directional trajectory, since it encompasses partial, repetitive, forced and voluntary movements. Drawing comparisons between the migration of West African farmers and Polish enforcement officers raises a whole range of urgent political and sociological questions. Just as tourism anthropologists long ago critiqued the binary distinction between hosts and guests (see Abram et al. 1997)¹⁰ that veiled our view of family visitors, settled visitors, migrant tourism workers and so on, mobility encompasses all sorts of tourism and leisure-related travel without fixing analysis in particular hospitable relations. It enables us to broaden the focus to include not only the movement but the structures and material means by which movement is made possible. Movement, the state of being in movement (mobility) and the potential to be mobile (motility) are performative moments and their potential. Just as being a tourists is less an identity than a set of ideas and relational positions, people can be migrants at home, and be at home as a migrant. The movement that Vium describes from 'somebody' to 'nobody' and back is one that migrants perform within their journeys that are full of intersections, hiatuses, uncertainty and danger. Lifting the label of 'migrant' (one rarely applied to the multi-homed international wealthy) enables us to see the persons moving. Mobility requires methods with nuance, and analytical angles that can tease out the axes for comparison as indicated in this volume. It is very clear from the contributions to this volume that a focus on mobility opens a path for innovative and integrative approaches, and that the requirement to conceptualise mobility generates new research questions and theoretical reflections for further development. Shifting the ground on which stereotypes of migration are founded is an essential tool in the armoury against racism, xenophobia and prejudice. Hence, the methods outlined in this book should be seen a crucial political moves, increasingly needed in a troubled world.

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AE: I think scope and content of this afterword work perfectly for the volume. I subscribe to comments made by Roger & Noel – once these are addressed, it will be a perfect conclusion to the manuscript.